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CHARACTER-STUDY AND EDUCATION.

I.

LIKE all emotional movements of thought, child-study has had its waxing and its waning, and the waning is now upon us. Hardy and faithful, indeed, is the man or the woman who today speaks enthusiastically about studying "the child." But it would be shallow reasoning and absurd to hold that child-study is only one more worn out "fad." When physiologists cease studying the body, when psychologists are no longer interested in the mind, when physicians concern themselves no more with physical character, then will teachers cease to study children. True, certain methods and phases of child-study have ceased to attract attention, but even these have their value in a study of childhood that shall be all-sided and well balanced. As for those who believe themselves capable of understanding child-nature instinctively, and amuse themselves with more or less humorous comments on some child-study fantasies of recent years, let us quietly remind them that our common-sense knowledge of mind-matters does not make psychology useless; that our practical precepts in regard to health do not take the place of hygiene; that because the New Testament contains plentiful milk for babes there is no reason why strong men should not seek for the critical strong meat required by their constitutions. But just as we do not cease our casual observations of human nature because we are psychologists, nor refrain from using common-sense rules because we are hygienists or physicians, nor disallow the milk of the gospel because we are able to eat its strong meat—so in child-study, in becoming more or less scientific students of child-life we must not lose our "unpremeditated art" in dealing with actual children. Moreover, just as a knowledge of botany quickens the spontaneous love of nature in the heart of the spiritual man, so ought scientific child-study to make us become more deeply interested in all children, more sympathetic and tactful in dealing with them. If there should

prove to be any inconsistency between the spontaneous and the scientific interest in children, the spontaneous interest always has the right of way, because it is easy for loving intuition to prepare the way for scientific insight, but hard for science to beget sympathetic and tactful interest in children.

Now, with all its faults, the child-study of the last fifteen years has produced some good results: greater care for the children's health; enhanced interest in securing character-results, in education; greater appreciation of the complexity of child-nature, and of the immense importance of individual differences; attempts to ascertain the stages of development in children, and to fit the studies of the school to those stages rather than to accommodate the stages to the studies; a better realization of the profound importance of the stage of adolescence; closer co-operation between parents and teachers. Not that child-study alone has produced these results and others that might be mentioned (*e. g.*, the establishment of observation schools, experimental schools, and so on), but that child-study has helped on improvements that had already begun or were ready to begin.

Admitting, then, that child-study, even in its rawest and craziest aspects, has been useful to education, let us endeavor to point out some of its mistakes and shortcomings, so that we may clear the ground for a more healthy and vigorous growth of character-study; for perhaps the chief mistake of child-study has been a failure sufficiently to appreciate the unity of human nature in all ages and stages and phases of development. The child *is* the father of the man; we are our own great-grandfathers! And in our child-study we wish to investigate the *character* in "varying childness," rather than certain abstract psychological phases of *mind*. Let us shortly state some of the shortcomings that characterize much of the child-study of recent years; then we can discuss each point in turn:

1. Child-study has been too largely the psychology of processes and states of mind rather than tendencies of character.

2. It has been too largely an accumulation of facts without order and relation, or else the facts have been sorted by means of merely psychological canons.

3. It has studied detached groups of facts without investigating their connection with organic character, without sufficient reference to the facts of development, and without thorough-going use of the comparative method.

This statement will suffice for the logically minded reader who wants to see the forest before studying the trees.

1. *Child-study too psychological in its material.*—Just because psychologists have been the leaders in child-study, nearly all the best work has been done by psychologists, professional or amateur. Here are some of the topics studied: discrimination of color and sound; co-ordination of movements; laws of association and memory; categories of interest; imagination; religious *imagery* (not religious *instinct*); primary emotions; imitation; psychological processes in play and games; reasonings. Now, many of these studies have an interest and a value of their own, and therefrom psychologists may gain divers hints; but are they *child-studies*? They are studies relating to more or less immature minds, but do they help us to understand children's *conduct* and *tendencies of character*? The actual child is self-assertive, sympathetic, inquiring, gregarious, appropriate, dramatically expressive, tending to hero worship, and so on. These are some of the tendencies that determine his conduct and our discipline of his character. These relate him to his natural and social environment. Doubtless some studies have been made along these lines, but they have been psychological, dealing with mental *process*, rather than characterological (or ethological), dealing with *conduct*. It may be that apperception-masses and emotions and volitions and the like, will ultimately explain these tendencies of character. But in the meantime we want to know something about the instinctive springs of conduct of the human animal in a state of society. Before we can explain we must group and classify; before we can understand the molecular physics of character we must study its general mechanics. Or, to vary the figure, first the natural history of character, then its biology. We must not contend that the psychological study of character *must* wait until the study of instincts and tendencies has got well under way; indeed, it would

be vain babble to tell the human mind to limit its interest and activity in any direction. All we contend for is this: conduct is practically more important than process, character than mind, and in the normal development of science the natural-history method precedes the study of inner processes.

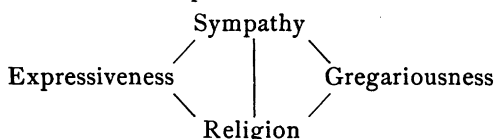
Since child-study is meant to be practically useful, and since psychology is a very difficult science, beyond the reach of most for whom child-study ought to be useful, then it would seem that we ought to study the human animal as he corresponds with his environment, in his instincts, habitual impulses, tendencies of conduct. Who can name the teachers or parents whose dealings with children have become wiser through psychological child-study? And how many of us are able to become interested in the depressing spectacle of a psychologizing primary teacher? While we must believe that the time will come when each teacher *can* be a practical psychologist, should we not in the meantime see to it that children's conduct becomes more understandable during all their periods of development? The Herbartian "general method" is a useful psychological *explanation of the steps* we generally take in teaching a topic; but we must know something about the child's instinctive tendencies of character, egoistic, altruistic, religious, social, economic, æsthetic, ethical, and the like, if we are to teach *children* rather than mental mechanisms.

2. *Character is organic and unitary, hence mere accumulations of data, with running commentaries thereon, have little practical or scientific value.*—Even if the material of child-study include facts of tendency and conduct, we need some concrete scheme whereby we may picture to ourselves the correlations of traits or tendencies, instead of simply sorting them in any convenient way we may happen to light on. Although some students of childhood apparently have thought that a sufficiently large assemblage of supposedly cognate facts would lead to an induction, thus far the "inductions" have failed to put in an appearance. True, Darwin achieved great results by collecting from all quarters in a manner seemingly without plan. But all who have read Darwin's life know how early in his career the organic conception of natural

selection was the mainspring of his interest and the organizing factor in his work. All great accumulators of facts are not Darwins, and all great constructive scientific minds have not been collectors of large masses of facts. Does it not produce a sort of intellectual vertigo to wade through a long array of unorganized "duly authenticated facts"? One's mind cries out "Lost! lost!" as the innumerable trees of "fact" close in around him. Even though the facts be about one child and are chronologically arranged, whatever our personal or human interest, we become weary unto death after a few pages of such reading.

Facts are valuable in proportion as they have significance, and that significance depends on their interrelation and their reference to some central thought or principle. Hypotheses are useless except as they bind facts together and give them significance, but facts are barren unless they relate themselves together according to a plan or hypothesis. One sufficiently crucial and significant fact may bring about an induction; libraries full of disconnected or merely empirically connected facts do nothing but serve as a monument to the patient stupidity of man. Hence, realizing this, the man with a *questionnaire* usually has a hypothesis he wishes to test, and he *ought to have it*. And many of us would be devoutly thankful if he would only frankly tell us what it is he is trying to test, prove, or verify. If we need hypothesis or tentative principle of classification in the material sciences, how much the more do we need such help when we study *character*, which is organic, unitary, microcosmic! If in embryology we must study pictorially and diagrammatically the organism as a whole and the interrelation of the parts; if in physiology we learn to picture the nervous system as the "master tissue, bringing the parts of the body into functional correlation," does it not seem plain that the embryology and physiology of character require the pictorial and diagrammatic aids whereby the scientific imagination can dispose its material in space? Is character at any level of development a mere jumble of traits and tendencies, or are these related in a picturable way? For instance, children are self-assertive, sympathetic, abounding in curiosity, gregarious, appropriative, expressive. How are

these tendencies related structurally and functionally, and how can these relationships be pictured? If descent can be symbolized in a genealogical table, why not the differentiation and integration of character-tendency? Give us some mode—pictorial, diagrammatic, representative, symbolic, illustrative—call it what you will—by means of which we may concretely correlate our facts, indicate the descent and kinship of tendencies, review with the eye of sense and imagination the interconnected levels of development. For instance, suppose I want to show that the religious impulse is a direct descendent of the sympathetic and collaterally related to gregariousness and childlike expressiveness, how better than with the aid of simple lines? Thus:



On the same diagram I can indicate that sympathy enters into both gregariousness and expressiveness. Suppose further that the desire for *property*, the proprietary sense, buds out about the same time as religion and has its own system of relationships; how almost impossible it is to show that the proprietary and religious instincts are on the same level, are correlated, have cognate instincts that are correlated with each, and that both develop into further differentiations—I say, how extremely difficult to hold these relationships in mind without using diagrams! Just as the organs and functions of the developing animal are correlated, so is it with the impulses and instincts that are the springs of conduct. Our child-study has had no maps and charts. Shall it not have them?

3. *Child-study has not made sufficient use of the comparative method, and has therefore failed to emphasize those character-tendencies that belong to man at all stages of his development.*—In the study of children's *this, that, and the other* many have failed to notice that the dominant traits of childhood are no less characteristic of the adult. It has been assumed that the child and the adult are much farther apart than they really are. While some see that savage and civilized are essentially and fundamentally alike in

character, and others see the resemblances between child and savage, few have tried to trace out the correspondences of each stage of individual character with every other stage. If it is true to say, "Scratch a Russian and you find a Tartar," it is equally true to assert, "Scratch an adult and you find a child." To be "boy eternal" is the privilege of every man; indeed, few care to be more than grown-up children.

The contention that child-study often makes untrue distinctions between child and adult can be well illustrated by an application of the comparative method to the study of "interests."

Some years ago Binet and others thought they found that children are especially interested in the category of "use" and in "activity" generally. It was thought that because children gave definitions in terms of "utility," and seldom used a "larger term" (such as "animal" in defining "horse"), therefore children are interested in *use* and not interested in generic terms. Well, try the experiment of having college students, school-teachers, business-men, and other adults give some *spontaneous* definitions. Warn them that they must write down (or, better, speak out) the *first* definition "that pops into their heads." A number of such trials have shown and will show that *all of us* spontaneously define in terms of *use*, and that logical definition is usually an afterthought. Moreover children's "something that," and like expressions are functionally equivalent to "larger terms." They are *x*'s that stand for the child's lack of knowledge, but testify to his spontaneous desire to include a more generic term in his definition.

Take another case. Much has been written about the "psychology of the crowd." Investigation will show that "the mob" is nothing but a number of adults whose instincts are working on the child-level. No theories of "atavism" or of "collective consciousness" are needed to explain the phenomenon. They are manifestations of childishness or of childlikeness. Shakespeare has caught the idea of childlikeness and childishness in adults, and has most wonderfully worked it into *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is essentially a play of the child-level.

Busying ourselves with the countless results of a child's

thinking, feeling, and doing, we often fail to see the great, stable bed-rock of *tendency* that underlies the shifting sands of caprice and convention, mood and whim. We call a man irreligious because he fails to conform to some of our conventions, or to share some of our beliefs, and we often fail to realize that the religious *tendency*, whether in man, woman, or child, civilized or uncivilized, is reverence for higher character and a feeling of dependence upon it. Again, we call the savage's music unmelodious and inharmonious; whereupon John Comfort Fillmore and Miss Alice Fletcher teach us to *find* its melody and make explicit its implicit harmony.

Child-study has largely failed to realize the essential unity of character-tendencies in all grades of human nature.

4. *Child-study has been of little direct service to education.*—While its larger human results have not been insignificant, child-study has wrought no important educational reforms. Psychology failed to secure for us a satisfactory correlation of studies. Child-study, through a study of the correlation of tendencies, might have helped us to lay a solid basis for a scientific course of study, or to strengthen the foundations already laid. For example, what are the tendencies of character fostered by geography, by history, by literature? Child-study has psychologized a little on the subject, but what has it done (to take an instance) to relate man's appropriative and economic instincts to geography, or his gregarious and clannish instincts to history? The succession of ideas to be brought out in these studies will depend on the stages of development reached by the character-tendencies corresponding to them. And we shall succeed in correlating studies only as we correlate the large tendencies of character and have the studies fit the child rather than the child the studies.

If child-study has affected discipline, its influence has not been altogether good. Perhaps we respect the individuality of the child more than formerly, but are we helping the children to respect *our* individuality? We are more sympathetic; can the same be said of the children? We are living for our children more than we used to; but do *they* care more for *our* good and the good of their fellows? We are respecting children's "rights;" are we teaching them their duties?

Has child-study done anything for the education of character by telling us what tendencies, what motives, are dominant during the various periods of development? Surely it is important for teachers and parents to know, for example, whether hero worship is the best note to strike in the discipline of the primary grades; whether love of beauty and honor ought to characterize the grammar grades; whether the logical impulse ought to be dominant in the high school. And has child-study done anything for method, or does Herbartianism still stand as the soundest set of principles? Perhaps a more comprehensive and systematic child-study will be able to energize the Herbartian dogmas (for example) with a scientific (not sentimental) infusion of the Froebelian rhythm of work-and-play.

In fine, summing up our suggestions, we may hope that the child-study of the future will be (1) more zealous to study the tendencies of character that relate children to their natural and social environment; (2) more interested in taking bird's-eye views of the whole character during its various stages of development (3) more assiduous in its use of the comparative method and in its search for fundamental tendencies that last during the whole development; (4) more useful in applying its results to the practical and scientific study of curriculum, discipline, and method.

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